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Introduction

On 30 July, 2007, social and political critic, novelist and political activist Oda Makoto died in Japan at the age of 75. Throughout his life, he published numerous essays and more than 100 books including some thirty novels. Two of his novels, *Hiroshima* and *Gyokusai* (The Breaking Jewel), have been translated into English and dramatized for a BBC radio program and broadcast worldwide. In Japan, however, he is remembered above all as the political activist who founded and led *Beheiren* (Japan Peace-for-Vietnam Citizen's Alliance), a major grassroots movement against the Vietnam War, which gained extraordinary popular support in the 1960s and 1970s.

Oda Makoto at 75

Oda was boundlessly energetic in promoting peace and democracy, and in criticizing all forms of injustice, inequality and discrimination. In the past several years, he was particularly active in the movement against reforming Japan's peace constitution and played an important leadership role in protecting Article 9.

Oda was one of inaugural members of the Article 9 Association, a nation wide civil organization established in June 2004 to campaign against the Liberal Democratic Party's plan to abolish the pacifist clauses of Article 9 of the constitution. However, considering the current situation, in which Article 9 is step by step being eroded by state actions, Oda sought to popularize the idea of peace and non-violence through grass root movements. He called, for example, for a movement to make Japan a "Conscientious Objector Nation". This was because of his strong belief that the constitution itself is useless without persistent popular efforts to promote peace. Shortly before his death, Oda repeatedly warned of the fact that the Nazis seized power by making the Weimar Constitution practically ineffective, for example, by enacting a law that gave the Nazis carte blanche in 1933. He claimed that this German experience teaches us how important it is for the idea of peace and non-violence to permeate nationwide if we wish to protect our peace constitution.

Oda studied Greek philosophy as an undergraduate at Tokyo University between 1952 and 1957, before going to Harvard for a year on a Fulbright scholarship in 1958. His interest in Greek philosophy, in particular the origins of the idea of democracy, continued throughout his life. Classical thought strongly motivated and informed his political development. However, it was his unforgettable encounter as a young boy with the indiscriminate bombing of Osaka City in the last days of the Asia-Pacific War that most profoundly shaped his ideas and writings, and led to his deep commitment to humanitarian causes throughout his life.

This paper examines the inter-relationship between his experience of U.S. aerial bombing and his philosophy as a writer and activist.

The vivid memory of air raids on 14 August 1945

Did the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bring an end to the long and bloody war in the Asia Pacific region? If your answer is 'Yes, it did,' then how do you explain the fact that relentless saturation bombing of Japanese cities by U.S. forces continued up until 14 August 1945, five days after the bombing of Nagasaki and the day before Japan officially surrendered to the Allied nations? This is the question that Oda Makoto often put to audiences at his public lectures.

One of the last bombing raids on 14 August 1945 targeted Osaka City, where 700 one-ton bombs were dropped from 150 B-29 bombers. The main target was the army arsenal near Osaka Castle, but bombs also fell on Kyobashi railway station, where two passenger trains had just arrived, approaching from opposite directions. Many civilians were killed by direct hits. At that time, Oda was a 13 year old boy, hiding in a shabby and fragile air raid shelter in his backyard, trembling with fear from the horrific noise and vibration. Indeed, one of the one-ton bombs fell just 200 meters from his shelter. Osaka was bombed almost 50 times between 19 December 1944 and 14 August 1945, and Oda personally experienced many of these attacks. In total, about 15,000 people were killed, 340,000 houses were destroyed, and an estimated 1.2 million people lost their homes and were driven from the city.

Osaka damage from bombing raids

Oda's vivid memories included the distinctive smell of corpses under the rubble caused by the bombing. Remembering this smell, he wrote in the introduction to his last book, *Churyu no Fukko* (Restoration of the Middle Class), published two and a half months before his death:

> 'It is the powerful impression of the smell that I cannot forget from my experience of the aerial bombing of Osaka. In other words, it was the foul smell reeking from corpses. Dead bodies did not stink while the bombing was going on, as they were still fresh. But a few days later we junior high school boys were mobilized for clean up operations and had to drag the dead bodies out from under the rubble. By then the bodies were decomposed and they stunk like hell. I could not eat tinned salmon for a long time after the war, because the smell of tinned salmon is almost the same as that of decomposed bodies.'

The experience of being showered with bombs and the foul smell of dead bodies left a deep impact on Oda, creating memories which seemed to linger until his death. Throughout his writings, we find numerous references to this war-time experience. Until last year, Oda gave a public lecture on war and peace each year on 14 August in Osaka, indicative of the significance of this experience for him. In other words, the horror of 14 August 1945 was an important source for his ideas, and inspiration for the array of social and political critiques he produced, as well as his novels.

Another whose work was deeply affected by the bombing of Osaka was the *manga* writer Tezuka Osamu. Tezuka, born in Osaka in 1928. Four years Oda's senior, he was a high school student in 1945, but by the time of the U.S. bombing of Japanese cities, he and his fellow students had been mobilized to work at an army arsenal. He was often reprimanded for drawing comics rather than concentrating on his work at the arsenal – as punishment, he was ordered to go up the watchtower in the factory yard to look out for B-29 bombers and sound the alarm. He later described one air raid:

> 'As the air raid warning siren began, as usual, I saw that a formation of U.S. bombers was heading towards us along the Yodogawa River. As soon as I thought "here they come," incendiary bombs were showered down on us, making a loud noise like heavy rain. Bombs streamed down one after another on the factory. When I thought that this was the end of my life, exposed on the top of the watchtower, a bomb directly hit the roof just two meters below me. Later I heard that this bomb killed all the people who had rushed into the air raid shelter under the building. I tumbled down the watchtower, screaming as if I had gone mad. All around me, the ground was a sea of fire … and houses in every direction were burning with leaping flames and rumbling sound. Then rain with black soot came down. I walked to the top of the river bank of the Yodogawa. From there, I saw many big craters hollowed by bombing, where numerous objects resembling human bodies were lying on top of one another (The bodies were so fractured that they did not look like human beings.) … Later I was told that ten large bombs were dropped on the Ohashi Bridge over the upper stream of the Yodogawa River. The bridge was packed with people who were running away, and there were many who took shelter under the bridge. Afterwards, people saw many blown-up heads floating down the river.'

Tezuka produced numerous *manga* and animation films with fascinating stories until his death at the age of 60 in 1989. Tezuka chose themes for his stories that were similar to those of Oda's work: war and peace, discrimination and violence, alienation of human beings, political corruption and the like.

These personal accounts by Oda and Tezuka of the bombing of Osaka vividly convey the horror of life under the shower of bombs. Yet the attackers, hundreds of meters above, have little sense of the horror down below. For the bombardiers and pilots, the people on the ground are simply abstract targets. In contrast, the experience of their victims is stark reality, reeking of death and destruction. This sharp juxtaposition of abstract and concrete within a distance of a few hundred meters is a phenomenon unique to aerial bombing.

The premium placed on aerial bombing in modern warfare surely owes something to the attackers' complete inability to imagine the terrifying experiences of their victims.

This psychological remoteness of pilots and bombardiers from the reality of the horror on the ground is well described by Charles Lindbergh, who flew the first solo, non-stop flight across the Atlantic in 1927. Lindbergh also flew combat missions in the Pacific Theater as a consultant for the Commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces, General Henry Arnold, during World War Two:

> 'You press a button and death flies down. One second, the bomb is hanging harmlessly in your racks, completely under your control. The next it is hurtling down through the air and nothing in your power can revoke what you have done. ……. How can there be writhing, mangled bodies? How can this air around you be filled with unseen projectiles? It is like listening to a radio account of battle on the other side of the earth. It is too far away, too separated to hold reality.'

The origins of Oda's "humanitarian wrath against injustice"

The reason that Oda was so focused throughout his life on the bombing of Osaka was not simply the horror that he personally experienced. Another reason was the leaflets that the U.S. bombers dropped on Osaka at the same time as the bombing on 14 August 1945. The leaflet said in Japanese: 'The war has ended with the surrender of your government.' Oda picked up a copy and read it, but did not know how to grasp it. Twenty hours later, Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender on radio.

Oda was puzzled by why U.S. forces chose to kill so many civilians in bombing Osaka, knowing that the Japanese government was going to surrender the next day. He also wondered why the Japanese government had not conceded to the Allies immediately after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki if not before. On 10 August 1945 - the day after the bombing of Nagasaki - the cities of Kumamoto and Miyazaki in Kyushu Prefecture and Sakata in Yamagata Prefecture were bombed. Two days later, Kurume, Saga and Matsuyama were targeted, and on 13 August Nagano, Matsumoto, Ueda and Otuki were bombed. On 14 August in addition to Osaka, Akita, Takasaki, Kumagaya and Odawara became the victims of the last U.S. bombing raids of the Asia Pacific War.

Oda remained skeptical of the official interpretation offered by the U.S. and tacitly accepted by the Japanese government - that the atomic bombing was the decisive factor in forcing Japan's surrender. He wondered for many years what really happened in 1945 between 9 - 15 August. In order to discover the answer to this question, during his stay in the United States in 1957, he investigated American newspapers published on those days. He noted the following articles in the *New York Times:*

On 11 August 1945, on the front page, together with a large photo of the crowd in Times Square celebrating the news of imminent victory, three banner headlines read:

JAPAN OFFERS TO SURRENDER

U.S. MAY LET EMPEROR REMAIN

MASTER RECONVERSION PLAN SET

On 12 August 1945, the headlines read:

ALLIES TO LET HIROHITO REMAIN

SUBJECT TO OCCUPATION CHIEF

MACARTHUR IS SLATED FOR POST

On 13 August 1945, the headlines read:

ALLIES TO LOOSE MIGHTY BLOWS ON JAPAN

IF SURRENDER IS NOT MADE BY NOON TODAY

CARRIER PLANES RENEW TOKYO ATTACKS

These newspaper reports over the three days imply that sometime after the bombing of Nagasaki on 9 August and before 11 August (U.S. time), the Japanese offered the Allied nations their surrender with the one condition of maintaining Hirohito as emperor, and the United States was ready to accept this conditional surrender. The 11 August headline **U.S. MAY LET EMPEROR REMAIN** seems to endorse this interpretation. By the following day, 12 August, as the headline **ALLIES TO LET HIROHITO REMAIN** clearly shows, it was almost certain that Hirohito's life would be spared, although this would depend on the decision of the chief of the occupation forces. This time, the word "MAY" was dropped from the news headline.

However, the Japanese government remained divided over the surrender. The United States therefore warned that the bombing of Japanese cities would continue and Tokyo would be targeted again unless Japan surrendered by midday of 13 August. By 14 August (Japan time), the United States must have been informed by the Japanese government that it would offer nominal "unconditional surrender," knowing that the U.S. government would save Hirohito. Despite this, the U.S. Bomber Command went ahead with the prescheduled bombing of Osaka and other cities, perhaps to assure that the Japanese government would surrender as promised.

Through a study of American media reports, Oda was convinced that the Japanese government refused to surrender until Hirohito's life was guaranteed and the retention of Japan's emperor system was assured by the U.S. government. He therefore claimed that the war was ended by the American government's conspiracy with the Japanese government, to save Hirohito's life and the monarchy. On this basis, he rejected the myth later created by the Japanese authorities, that Japan had offered unconditional surrender in order to save the Japanese people from hardship, and that the emperor had bravely stated that he would accept any fate after the surrender. Indeed Oda's interpretation of the factors delaying Japanese surrender is historically correct. It is now a widely

recognized historical fact that the Japanese government held out for Hirohito's safety through nearly a year of US saturation bombing and two nuclear bombs until the U.S. government guaranteed it shortly after the bombing of Nagasaki.

It is also well known to Japanese historians that Hirohito endorsed the Imperial forces' plan for the Battle of Okinawa, hoping that he would be able to negotiate more favorable surrender terms with the Allied nations after inflicting heavy casualties on the US. As a result, by late June 1945 some 150,000 Okinawans (nearly one out of every three Okinawans). In addition to those killed by invading US forces, many Okinawan civilians were killed or forced to commit collective suicide by Japanese troops, giving rise to a controversy that continues to reverberate.

The indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Japanese cities by U.S. forces, which started at the end of November 1944, escalated sharply from February 1945. By early August more than one hundred cities and towns throughout Japan had been repeatedly attacked with incendiary bombs and the major cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Nagoya and Kobe had been leveled. In the single most devastating raid, on 10 March 1945 about 100,000 people in the Tokyo metropolitan area were burnt to death within a few hours by firebombs dropped from U.S. B-29 bombers. An estimated one million people lost their homes and were driven from the city. The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that "probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in a 6-hour period than at any time in the history of man."

Indiscriminate bombing reached its peak, however, when mass-killing atomic weapons were used to annihilate two Japanese cities in August 1945. The A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed between 70,000 and 80,000 people in one second, and it is estimated that a total of 140,000 died by the end of 1945. In Nagasaki, 70,000 people are believed to have died by the end of the same year. In the end, the U.S. bombing of Japan caused over one million casualties, including half a million deaths, the majority of whom were civilians, mainly women, children and the aged.

Japan's defeat was clear to war leaders on both sides as early as 1942, and with absolute clarity in the final year of the war. Yet because Hirohito and the Japanese government recklessly procrastinated and delayed the surrender, numerous civilians in Japan and other parts of Asia - and soldiers on both sides in the war theater - lost their lives. Ooka Shohei, the author of novels such as *Fire on the Plains* and *The Battle of Leyte*, once wrote that 'the existence of the Emperor (Hirohito) is harmful from the viewpoint of the souls of the people who lost their lives meaninglessly in four days between August 11 and 14 (1945).' Oda used the same phrase to assert that 'the existence of Emperor (Hirohito) is harmful from the view point of the souls of people who lost their lives due to the bombing of Osaka on 14 August 1945.'

In short, Oda not only personally experienced the brutality of war for ordinary citizens, but also learnt about injustice and the immorality of politicians and military leaders who mobilize citizens for war. He felt deep anger against this injustice and until his death drew on it to challenge all kinds of wrongdoing, particularly acts committed by state authorities against civilians. His anger therefore can be described as "humanitarian wrath against injustice."

The linkage between victims and assailants of war

Any ordinary citizen can become a victim of war. Oda, however, pointed out life's ambiguity in which one can become both an assailant and a victim of war. He tried to explain not a simple duality - that a war victim sometimes can be a war assailant at the same time - but the inevitability of becoming an assailant against other civilians by being dragged into war. For example, many Japanese of my father's generation committed war atrocities against other Asians, having been drafted into the military and sent abroad to fight. In the Vietnam War, the mass killing of Vietnamese civilians was perpetrated by ordinary young Americans who were forced to participate in the war through the draft. Today again, young Americans - many of them from poor family backgrounds - are committing atrocities against Iraq civilians. State authorities victimize their own citizens by sending them to the front lines. In the course of fierce fighting, they lose their humanity, brutalizing themselves and soon become assailants attacking not only enemy soldiers but also civilians.

Oda was acutely aware of this reality of modern warfare - that ordinary civilians subject to the draft kill other civilians in another country as a result of manipulation of nationalist ideology by state authorities. He always tried to appeal for peace by emphasizing this fact.

On the wall of Oda's study in his apartment in Nishinomiya hung a large copy of an aerial bombing photo taken from a U.S. bomber. It is Osaka city on 15 June 1945, yet another occasion when Oda had to rush into his home-made air-raid shelter. Great plumes of black smoke are rising, as the city is attacked by more than 100 B-29s. During this attack, about 500 people were killed, 2,300 people were injured, and more than 53,000 houses were destroyed or damaged. Oda often showed this photo to visitors saying that he was under that black smoke. He hung this photo, however, not simply because he himself had lived under the bombs, but because he wished to keep reminding himself of similar bombings that Japanese Imperial forces had conducted against the people of China. He explained it this way.

> 'I had seen many similar aerial photos and films of the bombing of Nanjing and Chungking conducted by Japanese Imperial bombers during the "China Incident." They were photos and newsreels similar to this photo of the bombing of Osaka, with black and white smoke covering the entire city. … But I overlooked something important. It is because of this failure that I hang this picture of the bombing raid of 15 June 1945 in my study, in which I myself was under the black smoke. Until I myself experienced aerial bombing, I did not know what kind of hell this wide black smoke was creating for the Chinese people on the ground.'

As I explained earlier, a view of the ground from a bomber, which is clearly represented by aerial photos of the bombing of civilians taken from high in the sky, turns the horrific deaths on the ground into an abstraction. It is difficult to realize the intensity of the horror until one personally experiences aerial bombardment. Looking at this "abstract photo" every day, Oda must have tried not to forget the juxtaposition between the abstractness of the deaths of civilians in the eyes of the assailants and the concrete reality of that experience in the eyes of the victims.

In any war, it is almost inevitable that enemy forces are dehumanized. This leads to the dehumanization of the civilian population of enemy nations as well, even though these civilian faces may be similar to those of one's own people. If one wishes to prevent the dehumanization of citizens of any country and thus to reduce acts of violence, war and terrorism throughout the world, it is most important for each of us to examine such acts from the viewpoint of the victims. To comprehend the violence as seen through the eyes of victims, one must listen to the voices of victims, to re-experience their physical and psychological injury, and to internalize their pain as one's own. Sharing memories in the true sense becomes possible only through this process of re-living and internalizing the pain of others.

In looking at the photo of the bombing of Osaka, Oda must have tried to share memories not only with Chinese victims of Japanese bombing, but with victims of indiscriminate attack everywhere, past or present. At the same time, Oda must have been trying to remind himself of our own potential to become assailants, by killing civilians of other nations.

This explains why he initiated and led "*Beheiren*" (Japan Peace for Vietnam Citizen's Alliance) in April 1965. In early 1965, U.S. forces began the full-scale bombing of North Vietnam. Many photos and newsreels of the U.S. attacks on North Vietnam appeared. But this was not simply a U.S.-Vietnam war. Over the next decade, large numbers of bombers, troops and military supplies were dispatched from U.S military bases in Japan, and particularly Okinawa. *Beheiren* was formed to oppose U.S. aggression and particularly to resist Japanese support for the U.S. war effort. Popular fears that Japan might again be dragged into war provided one important foundation for the anti-war movement. But Oda stressed other issues.

Beheiren Anti-Vietnam War demonstration of April 24, 1965 shows the formality of the Beheiren style in the glare of the hoped for international media

In particular, he promoted the idea that the Japanese people should avoid becoming "war perpetrators," by refusing to collaborate with the United States in bombing and killing Vietnamese. He pointed out that Japanese media had paid ample attention to the victimization of Japanese by firebombs and atomic bombs, but little to the role Japanese played as assailants during the Asia Pacific War and subsequent Asian wars. To grasp the possibility of Japanese becoming assailants in the Vietnam War, he stressed the necessity of clearly recognizing the historical fact that the Japanese people had been both victims and assailants in the Asia-Pacific War. It was a powerful appeal at a time when not only the general population but also many intellectuals were preoccupied with only one side of their war experiences - as victims both of the Japanese military and of U.S. bombing.

Beheiren "cabinet" meeting 1969. Oda center rear; Secretary-General Yoshikawa Yuichi (left); "Foreign Ministers" Muto Ichiyo (center on the floor) and Tsurumi Yoshiyuki (center left rear).

Oda's ideas on the linkage between victims and assailants of war, particularly through indiscriminate bombing, can be found in the first chapter, "Heiwa no Rinri to Ronri" (Ethics and Logic of Peace), of his book *Nanshi no Shiso* (Thoughts on Hard Death). He wrote:

> 'What is required of us is a persistent attitude: to always be aware of and critical of our own experience (or potential) as assailants, and at the same time to be critical of other peoples' conduct as assailants. In other words, the way for us to truly achieve the universal principle (of peace) is to keep criticizing the conduct of others as assailants, at the same time highlighting similar conduct by our own people. I believe that the words on the cenotaph in the Hiroshima Peace Park, "Please sleep peacefully, as (we) will not repeat the mistake," are fraudulent. At a glance these words appear to refer to the universal principle (of peace), but in fact they do not. On the contrary, it seems to me that they strongly reflect the present Japanese government's national principle not to stir up trouble between the United States and Japan by criticizing the crimes committed by the U.S. government. The phrase on the cenotaph appears to reflect an international and open-minded perspective. Yet, in fact, it is the lowest level, nationalistic and close-minded perspective, which does not comprise the universal principle (of peace), but is solely based upon our own experience merely as the victims.'

Oda was strongly critical of the hypocritical stance of Japanese political leaders and people in general towards the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ostensibly they adopted a self-critical attitude, claiming that they would never repeat the horrible mistake. Oda clearly asserted, however, that true self-criticism must comprehend the criticism of all wrongdoing, regardless of who is responsible for them. Failure to do so will prevent us from achieving the universal principle of humanity and peace. By promising not to repeat the mistake that the Japanese themselves did not commit, and simultaneously obscuring the crime that the Americans committed against the Japanese by failing to name the agent of the bombing, the real issue of "responsibility" becomes blurred. Through this "fraudulent" process, the Japanese see themselves only as war victims, and fail to acknowledge their own RESPONSIBILITY for the many "mistakes" they too made, above all in the Asia Pacific War. In other words, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was conveniently exploited to cover-up Japan's war responsibility, simply emphasizing the horror of nuclear attack, without pinpointing the real responsibility for this serious crime.

In this way, Oda not only established his philosophy on the universal principle of humanity and peace, but actively applied it to various Japanese grassroots peace movements that he led. He demonstrated through his writings and activities the need to firmly grasp our own potential as an assailant in order to be able to universalize our experience as war victims and utilize it to create powerful peace movements. Without such sharp and persistent self-criticism, he felt, our sense of ourselves as war victims becomes a narrow-minded perspective not one that leads to the establishment of rich and open relationships with citizens of other nations.

Kyuma Fumio's comments on atomic bombing and Japanese political leaders' sense of war responsibility

With the compelling logic of Oda's argument, we can easily understand the serious problem raised by comments made in June 2007 by Minister of Defense Kyuma Fumio, about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His statement that the atomic bombing was "unavoidable" to end the war is a typical example of the argument that a lack of self criticism for being war assailants will hinder us from clearly understanding the aggressive conduct of others, even when it is committed against us.

Due to public outcry, Kyuma was forced to resign as Minister of Defense shortly after he made these comments. It can be understood that with the word "unavoidable," he tried to endorse the official stance on this issue that the U.S. government has stubbornly maintained for more that 60 years since the end of the war: the argument that it was necessary to use atomic weapons against Japan in order to end the war, and if the war had continued, millions more people —Japanese, Americans, and Asians—would have died.

In reflecting on this issue we must not forget the undeniable historical fact that several tens of thousands of people were annihilated in an instant, and that after the bombing many more died and continue to die from effects of radiation. Furthermore we must not forget that, no matter how people perceive the morality of making the decision to drop the atomic bomb on the Japanese, killing a large number of civilians was a crime against humanity, according to the standard of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the so-called Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal), under which Japanese war criminals were tried and judged.

In July 2006, a group of Japanese peace activists in Hiroshima, including myself, organized the *International Peoples' Tribunal on the Dropping of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* . The charter of this tribunal was drawn based upon the Charter of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, all three judges were prominent scholars of international law, and the prosecutors and *amicus curiae* were also professional lawyers. The judgment of the Tribunal was handed down in July 2007, and the court presented a guilty verdict for all 15 American political and military leaders as well as one scientist, who were indicted for their shared responsibility in the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although lacking legal sanction, the Tribunal's verdict is a legal document, based on the constitution of the Charter, the indictment and the judgment, as set out by qualified judges and prosecutors. (On the Tribunal see the website.)

It must be emphasized that the criminality of a particular act defined by law cannot be justified by any non-legal argument to justify the conduct itself. As we have already noted, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not the decisive factor in ending the war, and its political justification was a myth created by the American government and tacitly endorsed by the Japanese government for self-serving reasons. Yet, even if such a myth were historically accurate, no historical or political justification can legitimate the criminality of mass indiscriminate killing of civilians by the atomic bombing. We must be careful not to blur the criminality of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by any historical or political debate on the justification for such criminal conduct. In other words, the issue of criminality must not be evaded by any political or historical assessment of the event.

When the controversy started, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo initially expressed no concern about Kyuma's comments, as Kyuma simply tried to explain the American interpretation of the atomic bombing. However, when the controversy led to nation-wide criticism of Kyuma, Abe quickly dropped support for his Defense Minister and offered "sincere apologies" to atomic bomb survivors. Abe's initial reaction clearly shows that the Prime Minister is also incapable of understanding the criminality of mass indiscriminate killing of civilians.

In fact, since the official surrender on 15 August 1945 the Japanese government has never officially protested the U.S. government's atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or, for that matter, the firebombing of more than one hundred Japanese cities and towns. The first and only Japanese official protest came immediately after the bombing of Nagasaki on 9 August, when the Japanese government sent a note to the U.S. government under the name of then Minster of Foreign Affairs, Togo Shigenori, condemning the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as "a new crime against human culture."

One crucial factor that renders Japanese politicians incapable of understanding American war responsibility, whether in Japan, in Vietnam or in Iraq, is lack of awareness of Japan's own war responsibility. Recently, nationalistic Japanese politicians – including former Prime Minister Abe - have been busy sanitizing the atrocities that Japanese troops committed during the Asia-Pacific War: downplaying or denying official responsibility for the comfort women system, the forced group suicide of Okinawan citizens during the battle, and the forced labor of Chinese and Koreans, for example. They trot out the usual clichés: "the Pacific War actually contributed to the liberation of Asia from Western colonization" and "the people's sacrifice was unavoidable in defending our nation and liberating neighboring Asian nations." In other words, basically they do not respect the life of individuals and hardly feel any moral responsibility for "sacrificing people for the national interest." Irresponsible politicians with similar ways of thinking as old military leaders now claim to be making Japan a "normal and beautiful nation" capable of conducting war. It is therefore not surprising that Oda felt the same humanitarian wrath against these politicians as against Japanese war leaders from the time of the Asia Pacific War.

If we do not accept responsibility for crimes that we committed against others, we will be incapable of recognizing similar crimes that others commit against us. Many Japanese politicians are now deeply caught in this vicious cycle. This is exactly what Oda repeatedly warned against throughout his life in speeches and writings.

Reconciliation in its true sense between the victims and assailants of war can only be reached when assailants accept responsibility for crimes they committed and offer sincere apologies and compensation to their victims, and in return when the victims tolerantly accept those apologies. To accomplish this, it is vital that assailants use their moral imagination in order to re-experience the psychological pain of the victims, and to internalize such pain as their own. As Oda clearly explained, by using the fraudulent thinking of the words on the cenotaph in the Hiroshima Peace Park ("Please sleep peacefully, as (we) will not repeat the mistake"), we cannot establish a humane, peaceful and culturally enriched inter-relationship between Japan and the United States based upon true reconciliation. The same can be said regarding Japan's relationship with nations of the Asia Pacific region that were victimized by Japanese colonialism or wartime military campaigns and atrocities.

Oda in Ohama

Contemporary Japanese neo-nationalists seek to make the issue of war responsibility as ambiguous as possible for both Japan and the United States. This is precisely because it would be difficult to prepare the Japanese to wage future wars if they acknowledge the fact that warfare inevitably involves atrocities and therefore responsibility for such atrocities. In other words, their attitude to war responsibility is closely linked to their persistent intention to remilitarize Japan. The Japanese government is vigorously pursuing militarization in clear violation of the Constitution, by upgrading the Defense Agency to a Ministry of Defense, through the overseas dispatch of troops, by engaging in missile defense and aerial bombing exercises, and by exploring the possibility of using the right to collective defense.

Oda's Vision of "Civil Society"

Oda questioned what actions we should take so that people who live in diverse regions with complex historical relationships can live harmoniously, freely, and on equal terms. His answer was "*Kyosei"* (co-existence or co-habitation) and from the late 1970s he started advocating this idea.

War does not allow the co-existence of peoples. To kill enemy solders and civilians means not only their physical annihilation but also the destruction of their values and way of thinking. Oda probably learnt the importance of "co-existence" through his war experiences, but further strengthened and developed this idea during his round-the-world trip between 1959 and 1960 on the way back to Japan from the United States. On this trip he met people in Mexico, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and encountered different cultures. In 1961, he published a book on his travel experiences entitled *Nandemo Mite Yaro* (Let's See Everything), which immediately became a best seller. In this early work, he exhibited an exuberant appreciation of diverse cultures and values, at a time when the majority of Japanese were ignorant about or disinterested in non-Japanese cultures, except that of America and Western Europe.

What kind of society did Oda envisage with the word "co-existence"? Oda often used the term "*shimin shakai*" (the civil society) as the model society that we should aim to build. He described his vision of "civil society" in the following manner:

> 'The definition of "civil society" that I believe in is very simple. It is a society in which individual members can live in peace, irrespective of age, sex, nationality and ethnicity, and enjoy equality and freedom without discrimination. The bases for that society, for example, are democracy as a political system, social welfare schemes as a social system, and a legal system to ban all forms of discrimination. We need a "social climate" as well. Even if we have a law to prohibit discrimination, it would be useless without a strong "social climate" to prevent discrimination generated in the society. The wealth that the community produces is also used for building such a society. That is a "civil society".'

Toward the end of his life, he also used the term "salad society" in addition to "civil society." A salad contains various vegetables, eggs, ham, cheese and the like. Each has its own value and distinctive flavor, yet in combination they produce an excellent taste as a salad. With the words "salad society," Oda implied that our society would only be a peaceful and culturally rich community when various different values not only co-exist but also work together, appreciating each other's value. In other words it would be a "multi-cultural society" without conflict between different social, political and ethnic groups. Of course it is easy to describe such an ideal society but extremely hard to establish it.

Despite his idea of a "peaceful society," ironically, Oda was highly polemical and quick to instigate an argument. He was fearless in criticizing anyone he disagreed with. For this reason, he was disliked by many people. He tended to go straight to fundamental issues and expose the source of a problem, without compromise. He was particularly critical of so-called intellectuals and academics, who tell others how society should be reformed, but do nothing themselves. Many people could not tolerate his uncompromising "directness" and were offended by his open criticism of their opinions. Yet Oda also had a great sense of humor and was highly charismatic. He could entertain and hold an audience brilliantly. In this sense, he was "un-Japanese." His compatriots found it difficult to accept him as "normal."

What I particularly admired in Oda was his strong commitment to his goal. He did not simply dream about peace for Vietnam or an ideal "civil society" or "salad society." Throughout his life, he never stopped striving for his dreams, utilizing political and social initiatives to move towards this aim.

In 1998, three years after the Kobe earthquake, Oda published a book entitled *Kore wa Ningen no Kunika?* (Is this a Country for Human beings?). There he severely criticized the lack of government relief measures for victims of the earthquake, condemning the government for abandoning the people ("*kimin*"). He also compared it with the wartime Japanese government policy of sacrificing the nation for the national polity (Emperor Hirohito), and questioned whether Japan is really a country for human beings. The earthquake killed more than 6,400 people. But because of the inadequacy of Japanese government relief measures for the survivors, in particular those who lost their houses, some 3,000 more died unnecessarily during the following year. In fact, many committed suicide due to severe financial problems and the hardships of life. This deplorable situation yet again raised Oda's humanitarian wrath against injustice. In 1996, he initiated and led a political movement demanding the enactment of a new law on relief measures for the victims of natural disasters. This movement finally succeeded in pressuring the Diet to enact such a law two years later, having overcome various political obstacles.

When this book was published, Oda sent me a copy. In front, next to his autograph, he wrote: 'It is a dream far beyond our reach to have a "country for human beings," but without this dream we cannot live.'

Oda's "country for human beings" is clearly the "civil society" or "salad society" that he dreamt of. My hope is that many people will share the dream that Oda entertained throughout his life and work together towards its realization, impossible as it may seem. Without such dreams, life would be dull and uninspiring.

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